# Measuring Our Performance and the Well-being of Children:

Indicators to Help Strengthen
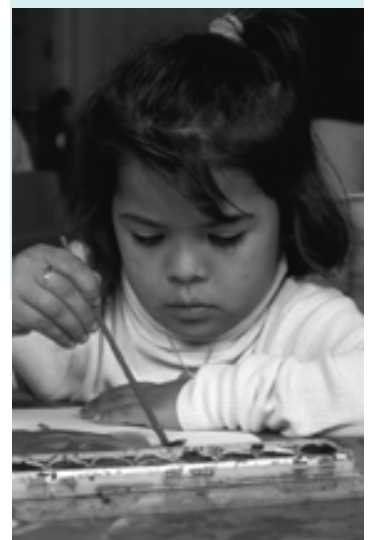Minnesota's Child Welfare System

*February 2000*

*M*innesota's child welfare system provides a continuum of services ranging from prevention and support services for families before they reach a crisis to intervention and preservation services for families when they are in the midst of a crisis. These services, provided at the local level by county human service agencies, are designed to help ensure positive outcomes for Minnesota children in vulnerable situations.

*At the Department of Human Services and in Minnesota's 87 counties, we will use performance and child well-being indicators to measure how well Minnesota's child welfare system is protecting children at risk of abuse and neglect, how well the system is providing permanent homes for children who can no longer remain in their own homes and how well child welfare best practices are being followed in these areas. The information we gain from the performance and child well-being indicators will help ensure the well-being of the children we serve and enable us to continue to improve child welfare services statewide.*

## The Challenge

In 1998, Minnesota counties received almost 16,200 reports of alleged child maltreatment involving more than 24,800 children. Forty-three percent of these children (10,572) were maltreated. Seventy percent of children maltreated were victims of neglect, 26 percent were physically abused, 8 percent were sexually abused and 1 percent suffered emotional abuse or mental injury. Many suffered multiple forms of abuse. Three Minnesota children died from maltreatment in 1998 and another 75 children suffered life-threatening injuries.

When children are no longer able to remain safely in their own homes, other safe living arrangements must be found for them. During 1998, more than 18,800 Minnesota children were in out-of-home placement. Currently, more than 900 children under state guardianship in Minnesota are in need of permanent adoptive homes. The Department of Human Services, counties and private adoption agencies are working in partnership to find a safe, nurturing, permanent home for every one of these children.

## Child Welfare Performance and Well-being Indicators Work Groups

In January 1998, the Child Welfare Performance Measurement Task Force, made up of state and county staff and a representative from the Children's Defense Fund, was formed to establish statewide performance measures for Minnesota's public child welfare system. The task force appointed a state-county Performance Indicators Work Group to develop performance measures for child safety, permanency for children, and child welfare system activity. The child safety and permanency outcome indicators measure the public child welfare system's performance in protecting children from recurring maltreatment and in securing permanent living arrangements for children. The system activity indicators measure adherence to best practices and help inform the child outcome indicator data. The Social Services Information System collects all of this data.

In June 1999, the State-County Child Well-being Work Group convened to develop well-being indicators for children served by the child welfare system. The link between child welfare services and the well-being of children in the child welfare system is tenuous because children's well-being is affected by a variety of factors, many of which may be outside the scope of the child welfare system. In addition, data typically used to measure child well-being frequently comes from health, education and corrections reporting systems which often are unable to identify children concurrently being served by the child welfare system. Consequently, the child well-being indicators do not measure outcome or progress but are indicators of the well-being of children served by the child welfare system at particular points in time.

The child welfare performance and child well-being indicators apply to Minnesota children who have been reported as maltreated, received public child welfare services, and/or been placed outside their homes.

*Counties can use this data to learn about successful child welfare system approaches throughout the state and to follow the best practices of others.*

## Child Safety Outcome Indicators

Desired outcome: Children will be protected from harm.

### Outcome indicator

1. Percentage of child protection cases with a new maltreatment finding while case is open for child protection services.

2. Percentage of child protection cases with a new maltreatment finding within 12 months of case closure.

3. Number of deaths and near deaths resulting from child abuse or neglect and child's living arrangement at time of death.

### What indicator measures

1. The extent of repeat child maltreatment occurring during the period children should be protected by the system.

2. The potential impact the system has on deterring repeat child maltreatment.

3. The extent of extreme child maltreatment and the settings where this maltreatment occurs to children in the system.

## Permanency for Children Outcome Indicators

Desired outcome: Children will live in permanent living arrangements.

### Outcome indicator

1. Percentage of children residing in a permanent living arrangement within 12 months of initial out-of-home placement.

2. Percentage of children in placement more than 12 months during the last 60 months.

3. Percentage of children whose parents' rights have been terminated and who are adopted within 12 months of termination of parents' rights

4. Percentage of children whose parents' rights have been terminated and who have not declined adoption, "aged out" of the system, and are not adopted.

### What indicator measures

1. The degree to which the system is meeting timelines for securing permanent placement for children.

2. The degree to which the system is securing permanent homes for children.

3. The degree to which the system is meeting timelines for securing adoptive homes for children whose parents' rights have been terminated.

4. The degree to which the system is securing adoptive placements for children whose parents' rights have been terminated.

*The child saftey and permanency outcome indicators measure the child welfare system's performance in protecting children from recurring maltreatment and in securing permanent living arrangements for children.*

# Child Well-being Indicators

These indicators apply to children who have been reported as maltreated, received public child welfare services and/or been placed outside their homes.

*The child well-being indicators do not measure outcome or progress but are indicators of the well-being of children served by the child welfare system at particular points in time.*

## Well-being indicator

### Social Adjustment

1. Percentage of children ages 11 through 18 arrested for a serious crime during the time a case is open.

### Educational Development

1. Percentage of children ages 3 to 5 who pass preschool screening by the time of case closing.

2. Percentage of children who pass the third grade basic standards test by the time of case closing.

3. Percentage of children who pass the fifth grade basic standards test by the time of case closing.

4. Percentage of children age 13 and older who pass the eighth grade reading, writing and math tests by the time of case closing.

5. Percentage of children ages 16 to 19 who are no longer in high school but receive their high school diploma or equivalent by the time of case closing.

6. Percentage of children not placed with kin who remain in their home school during placement.

## What indicator reveals

1. The extent to which children being served by the system are alleged to have committed crimes.

1. The extent to which children being served in the system are entering kindergarten ready to learn.

2. The extent to which children being served by the system are progressing academically.

3. The extent to which children being served by the system are progressing academically.

4. The extent to which children being served by the system are progressing academically.

5. The extent to which children being served by the system are completing high school or equivalent training.

6. The extent to which educational stability is maintained for children in out-of-home placement other than with relatives.

| Well-being indicator | What indicator reveals |
|---|---|

### Health

1. Percentage of children who have access to health care during the time a service case is open.

2. Percentage of youth under age 18 who become parents during the time a service case is open.

3. Percentage of children using drugs or alcohol during the time a service case is open.

1. The extent to which children in the system have access to resources to meet their physical and mental health care needs.

2. The extent to which adolescents being served by the system are having children.

3. The extent to which children being served by the system are using alcohol or illicit drugs.

### Family Well-being

1. Percentage of adult caregivers whose illicit drug or alcohol use within the last three months is affecting their ability to raise their children during the time a service case is open.

2. Percentage of families who have inadequate housing during the time a service case is open.

3. Percentage of families experiencing domestic abuse issues during the time a service case is open.

4. Percentage of adult caregivers who have the capacity to raise their children without outside assistance during the time a service case is open.

5. Percentage of families with incomes under federal poverty guidelines during the time a service case is open.

1. The degree to which drug or alcohol use by adult caregivers may contribute to the jeopardy of children being served by the system.

2. The degree to which substandard housing may contribute to the distress of children being served by the system.

3. The degree to which domestic abuse in families may contribute to the endangerment of children being served by the system.

4. The degree to which a caregiver's capacity to raise their children may contribute to the predicament of children being served by the system.

5. The degree to which family income may contribute to the hardship of children being served by the system.

Although the state and county have identified child well-being indicators, they are in the process of determining the best means of collecting the data.

*The state and counties can use child well-being indicators to assess the well-being of children under their care.*

# Child Welfare System Activity Indicators

These indicators apply to children who are at risk of maltreatment as well as children who have been maltreated.

*The system activity indicators measure adherence to best practices and help inform the child outcome indicator data.*

| Activity indicator | What indicator reveals |
|---|---|
| 1. Percentage of child maltreatment assessments initiated within 24, 48 and 72 hours of receipt of reports. | 1. Extent to which child maltreatment reports are assessed within designated timeframes. |
| 2. Number of children assessed for maltreatment and number of children with maltreatment determined. | 2. Extent of potential and actual child maltreatment in a geographic area. |
| 3. Number of cases in which child protection services were needed and number of cases in which child protection services were provided. | 3. Potential need for child protection services and actual child protection services provided in a geographic area. |
| 4. Number of children in out-of-home placement in a given year. | 4. Total unduplicated number of children in out-of-home placement during a calendar year in a geographic area. |
| 5. Median number of placements per out-of-home placement episode. | 5. Median number of changes in living arrangements for a child during an out-of-home placement episode. |
| 6. Median number of out-of-home placement episodes per child during the past 24 months. | 6. Median number of out-of-home placement episodes for a child within the last 24 months. |
| 7. Number of petitions filed to terminate parental rights and the percentage of those petitions granted. | 7. Potential and actual need for permanent placement services for children in a geographic area. |
| 8. Number of transfers of legal and physical custody of a child to a relative. | 8. Extent to which permanent living arrangements for children are secured with the children's relatives. |
| 9. Median length of time between termination of parental rights and placement of a child in a pre-adoptive home. | 9. Median length of time children free for adoption are in other out-of-home placements until pre-adoptive homes are secured for them. |
| 10. Median length of time from the date of parental rights' termination to placing a child in a permanent living arrangement. | 10. Median length of time all children whose parents' rights have been terminated are residing in temporary placement until a permanent living arrangement is secured for them. |
| 11. Percentage of children for whom adoption petitions are filed within 12 months of pre-adoptive placement. | 11. Extent to which desired timelines for filing adoption petitions are met for children in pre-adoptive placement. |
| 12. Percentage of children who are adopted within 12 months of filing an adoption petition. | 12. Extent to which children are adopted within 12 months of their adoption petition filing. |

## Use of Performance and Child Well-being Indicator Data

We will use performance indicators to provide uniform, statewide measures of the performance of Minnesota's public child welfare services. The indicators specifically measure how well Minnesota's public child welfare system is:

■ protecting children at risk of abuse and neglect

■ providing homes for children who can no longer remain in their own homes

■ following child welfare best practices to ensure positive outcomes for Minnesota's children.

We will use child well-being indicators to:

■ assess the well-being of children who are under state and county care

■ compare the condition of children currently served by the system with the condition of children served earlier by the system.

At the Department of Human Services, we will make this performance data available to policymakers on a county and statewide basis regularly and will also publish this information in an April annual report for the Minnesota Legislature and other interested stakeholders. We encourage county human service agencies to use this data to compare:

■ their own child welfare performance over time to the performance of other counties, and state and national performance averages

■ data on the well-being of children receiving child welfare services with corresponding data on all children in their counties, in the state and on a national level.

By doing so, counties will strengthen best practices at a local level to provide better services to children and their families.

The Department of Human Services will use this information to:

■ identify how and where child welfare services differ and to help determine what needs to be done to improve child welfare services statewide

■ monitor statewide public child welfare system performance over time

■ compare Minnesota's public child welfare system performance with that of other states and the nation as a whole.

This information will:

■ help legislators make informed policy decisions

■ help county commissioners evaluate the quality of services in their county and make funding decisions helpful to families and children

■ help county staff learn about best practices in other counties and incorporate them into the services they provide to children and families

■ help citizens learn about the child welfare system, the improvements it needs, and the services available to hold the system accountable and offer support where needed

■ help the state meet federal reporting requirements.

Ultimately, this will help children grow up in safe, nurturing, healthy families.



*The counties and the state will use this information to identify how and where child welfare services differ and to improve child welfare services statewide. All of this is done to help children in Minnesota.*

## Next Steps:

- By April 1, 2000, prepare the first quarterly report on the performance indicators for calendar year 1999, using new data from the Social Service Information System.

- By December 1, 2000, prepare the first annual report on Minnesota's child welfare system performance for calendar year 1999, using performance data retrieved from the department's new data system.

- By April 1, 2001, prepare the first quarterly report on the child welfare system performance indicators for calendar year 2000, including indicator data on the well-being of children served by the system.

*Counties can use this data to compare information on the well-being of children receiving child welfare services with corresponding data on all other children in their counties, in the state and in the nation.*

## Performance Task Force and Work Group Members

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